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5 OCTOBER 1973

MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Director for Intelligence

SUBJECT : The Role of Geography in Intelligence

As a geographic intelligence officer emeritus and one who is nearing the time for retirement from active service with this Agency, I would like to share with you some of my personal thoughts concerning the role of geography in intelligence.

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The Directorate of Intelligence has always had a "geographic intelligence" function and it has always had an organizational component bearing some form of the word "geography" in its title and charged with responsibility for carrying out that function. Yet there has never been a commonly agreed understanding--even among the responsible managers and geographic intelligence officers themselves--as to just what that function properly is. There has instead been much concern about what geographers should be doing, what they should not be doing, and how they could achieve greater recognition and acceptance for themselves and their field of endeavor.

If there has been this lack of common understanding within the "geographic intelligence" component, it is not surprising that the matter has been even less understood by other components of the Directorate and the Agency at large. Most seem to have the idea that the function--and the organization--has "something to do with maps". They are quite likely to identify geographers as "cartographers", or to refer to both the organization and the function, vaguely, as "Geographics" or "Cartographics". All of this has compounded the professional inferiority complex and the imagined or real lack of identity that have bothered so many of my geographic research colleagues for so many years, and have contributed to the persistence of a wasteful and, in my view, immature preoccupation with achieving greater "recognition".

A few of us were able to avoid this malaise, although in so doing we incurred the criticism of some of our colleagues and managers for not being sufficiently aggressive in "selling" geography and gaining recognition for our organization. We were convinced that what we were doing

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STAT

was useful, that our products (if not our people and our organization) were recognized, and that we were providing a kind of support--to the formulation and execution of foreign policy, to intelligence reporting and estimates, and to the planning and conduct of operations--that was a unique contribution not obtainable elsewhere in CIA. We did not aspire to be in the limelight, but were professionally motivated by the conviction that our contribution as trained geographers was necessary and valuable. I still believe that to be true.

Definitions

Just what is geography and what is its contribution to intelligence? In addressing an individual of your background and experience, I do not want to appear condescending, but because I have observed a lack of common understanding among Agency officials as to the actual meaning of the words, I feel that both terms require definition--albeit my own--for purposes of an essay such as this.

As I view it, the field of intelligence comprises the collection, systematic organization, evaluation and analysis, focused presentation, and dissemination of information concerning both basic and dynamic aspects of the physical environment, social characteristics, economy, politics, military capabilities, and scientific/technological development of foreign areas. In the federal government, broadly speaking, intelligence supports the formulation and execution of foreign policy.

I conceive of geography as the systematic study of earth space, involving both the analysis and synthesis of information concerning physical features and cultural activities as they occur--and as they interact--in an areal setting. Thus, geography does not involve a separate and distinct body of facts; instead, its subject matter draws from geology, geomorphology, meteorology, botany, ecology, agriculture, anthropology, sociology, transportation, industry, political science, military science, etc., etc., almost ad infinitum. And geography itself is a point of view, a method of inquiry into those fields.

Geography and Intelligence

It follows that geography per se is not a distinct topical subdivision of intelligence but is more in the nature of an intelligence process that can contribute essentially to the coordinated understanding of many discrete topical fields that are recognized subdivisions of intelligence. Thus one encounters transportation geography, military geography, agricultural

geography, political geography, etc.--and the ultimate contribution of the geographer: area synthesis.

In the spectrum of substantive topics dealt with by CIA, there are only a very few topics for which geographers clearly have the primary, if not exclusive, concern. These include the elements of the physical environment, political and territorial boundaries, mapping and survey activities, and place names. Largely through default by other offices, geographers have also become the resident "experts" in CIA on cultural anthropology, particularly for primitive societies and underdeveloped areas. But the preponderant bulk of the topics dealt with by geographers are also being dealt with by other intelligence officers--economists, military/strategic analysts, political scientists, etc. Though the geographer's approach to the topics--his method of inquiry--is distinctly different, the possibilities of overlap or duplication of effort are obvious, and point to a need for close coordination between the geographer area specialists and their area counterparts in other topical fields.

The Geographic Intelligence Officer: A Profile of Professional Competence

To assist in clarifying the role of geography in intelligence, it is useful to consider the people who practice geography as geographic intelligence officers. What competence should a geographic intelligence officer/area specialist be expected to have? What can he be expected not to be able to deal with? The following is an effort to profile a typical competent geographic intelligence area specialist in terms of "know-how":

Substantive competence. He should possess:

An understanding of the basic character and processes of the earth's physical environment, both in general and, especially, as they occur in his specific assigned area of responsibility.

Knowledge of the composition, characteristics, distribution patterns, and "way of life" of the population of his assigned area.

Knowledge of the existence, magnitude, and distribution patterns of the natural resources present in his assigned area.

Knowledge of the processes involved and the locational patterns that have been developed in the economic

exploitation of the natural resource base in his assigned area.

Knowledge of the system of territorial-administrative subdivision used in governing the assigned area.

Knowledge of the major aspects of the international relations of nations in his assigned area, especially those that involve territorial and locational matters.

Knowledge of strategic/military environmental factors relating to his assigned area.

Understanding of interrelations among any or all of the foregoing.

(In sum, he can be described with some validity as "an area specialist and topical generalist.")

Competence in Skills and Use of Analytic Tools: He should have:

Ability to present analyzed information effectively in written, oral, and/or graphic form.

Ability to interpret maps and charts.

Moderate ability to interpret aerial photography.

Foreign language ability is helpful but not always essential.

Competence in use of statistics could prove helpful for some areas, but is not essential.

Likely areas of non-competence. He is not likely to be knowledgeable concerning:

Details of scientific and technical developments in chemistry, physics, electronics, aeronautics, nuclear energy, engineering, and related fields.

Economic theory and details of international monetary developments and foreign trade.

Details of politics and political figures.

Details of military hardware and order of battle.

Detailed characteristics of equipment used in transport, telecommunications, and industrial processes.

Functional Applications of Geography in Intelligence

It is appropriate next to mention some of the major functional applications of geography in intelligence. Very broadly speaking, I see these as involving collection guidance, the data bank, intelligence production, and coordination.

The collection guidance function. Through continuous systematic geographic study of his assigned area, the geographic intelligence officer is inevitably developing and maintaining his own personal "Atlas of Ignorance" concerning that area. Thus he is able to identify information gaps that form a basis for collection requirements. Because of his distinctive multi-faceted approach to study of the area, he can be useful in reviewing and coordinating the requirements submitted by various topical specialists as well as in submitting his own unique requirements. His understanding of foreign environments also enables him to provide advice and guidance concerning environmental considerations that may affect the planning and execution of specific intelligence collection operations.

The data bank function. His broad, multi-topical approach to consideration of foreign areas requires the geographic intelligence officer to develop and systematically organize for his own use a reservoir of diverse areally-focused information to permit efficient retrievability for application to problems as they arise. The experience thus gained in dealing with his own working reference files enables him to contribute to both areal and topical aspects of organizing larger and more complex data banks in centralized reference facilities. (It is a truism that the area knowledge stored in, and recallable from, the minds of the collective geographic intelligence area specialists also forms a vital part of "the data bank".)

The intelligence production function. This involves the preparation and presentation of tailor-made problem-oriented area analyses designed to answer specific requests from policy formulators, intelligence collectors, intelligence producers and estimators, and/or operations officers. It also includes the self-initiated preparation and presentation of areally focused information analyzed and interpreted to provide the recipients with an enhanced understanding of the area treated and, thus, of current or future problems that may occur there. The variety of requests received and problems addressed is exceedingly broad; the one thing that all geographic intelligence products have in common, however, whether they be interpretive analyses or merely descriptive accounts, is a concern with spatial/locational relationships on some portion of the earth's surface.

The coordination function. Geography's systematic approach to area analysis through consideration of the full range of physical and cultural features makes geographic intelligence officers well-suited to coordinating roles and to participation on interdisciplinary teams and task forces that deal with foreign area problems. Geographic area specialists can also perform a highly useful service by reviewing intelligence issuances and operational and logistical plans to insure that they are "geographically sound", i.e., that they have properly taken into consideration the physical and cultural environment of the area concerned.

Relation to Policy

If intelligence is considered as policy support, it is clear that geographic intelligence usually tends to support other intelligence rather than to be directly on the "cutting edge" of the intelligence/policy relationship. Occasionally, as for example in the case of a political geographic contribution on territorial seas and boundary problems, the relationship to policy formulation can be quite close. But most often, geographic intelligence tends to be closer to the "cutting edge" of the intelligence/policy execution (i.e., operations) relationship than of the intelligence/policy formulation relationship.

The fact that geography's contribution to policy formulation is seldom direct, however, does not mean that it is unimportant. A fundamental fact must be recognized: as a consequence of longstanding deficiencies in our educational system, Americans in general are woefully lacking in basic "geographic" knowledge of foreign areas. Regrettably, this deficiency often extends to individuals in important policy-forming and decision-making positions in our government. This poses a troublesome and sometimes controversial question for analysts and managers of geographic intelligence production: When will a self-initiated project make a useful contribution or when will it be "too thin" (to quote a reason often used by managers in rejecting selfinitiated projects)? Intelligence officers must guard against a tendency--nurtured by their own personal knowledge of the area in question and their desire to avoid "insulting the intelligence" of their customer--to assume that the high-level reader surely must already know "all that basic elementary stuff". More often than not, I believe, he doesn't! And he is probably even less likely to comprehend the way in which disparate basic characteristics of an area interact. Yet those characteristics and their interaction often importantly influence various possible policy decisions or contemplated courses of action. It is here that geography can make a unique and essential contribution to intelligence--

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through interpreting various integrated combinations of physical and cultural factors present in an area, in order to permit an enhanced understanding of the intrinsic character of the area as it would relate to a specific intelligence, policy, or operations problem.

Organizational Placement of the Function

Next, I would like to volunteer a few thoughts on organizational placement of the geographic intelligence function. When the Directorate's first-order organizational subdivision for intelligence production is a functional one, as it now is, it is probably most efficient to keep the geographic intelligence function in a single component. As intelligence officers, geographers usually function better as area specialists than as topical specialists; within their own functional geographic research component they can operate in just that way--as area specialists. This functional organization of the Directorate, however, requires a larger number of geographic intelligence officer slots than would a regional organization. Furthermore, it is more likely to involve geographers in work that duplicates or overlaps that of other functional units, to make the need for coordination more critical, and to stimulate parochial concern for "recognition" of the geographers' own organizational unit.

If the first-order breakdown of the Directorate for intelligence production were changed to a regional one, of course, the separate geographic research component could logically be disbanded--thus eliminating the focus of parochial concerns over its "recognition"--and the geographic intelligence area specialists could be distributed throughout the regional components, where they would perform as members of the regionally focused multidisciplinary research teams. The need for coordination between major components would be less, and fewer geographers would be required to provide necessary levels of "geographic" input into the Directorate's intelligence production.

A Note on Organizational Nomenclature

As long as the functional organization is in effect, however, and since the term "geography" is so poorly understood, I suggest that the term "area analysis" might be more meaningfully used to describe the intelligence activities [REDACTED]. The term "geographic intelligence", on the other hand, could still be used to refer to the broader organization--essentially the pre-1965 Geographic Research Area of ORR. Thus, an "Office of Geographic Intelligence" (OBGI minus NIS) could include the

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The foregoing discussion has ranged widely, as indeed the field of geography does. If the views expressed have been of any value to you in gaining additional perspectives on geography and its relation to intelligence, I am content.

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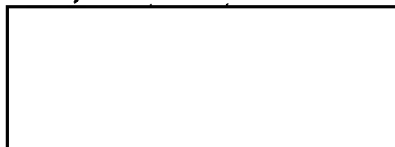
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MEMORANDUM FOR: DDI

Ed: I am attaching some unsolicited thoughts for your "rainy day" reading. The views expressed are entirely my own -- uncoordinated and, I'm sure, unshared by some practitioners of the "art."

. . .for whatever they're worth.



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11 September 1973

DDI-1344-73

MEMORANDUM FOR: Associate Deputy Director for Intelligence

SUBJECT : Newly Completed History in the DDI Historical Series

1. I am forwarding herewith for your information one copy (Copy 2 of 4) of a newly completed history, Procurement of Maps for the Intelligence Community, 1946-1971, [redacted]

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[redacted] The history has been approved by John Kerry King, Director for Basic and Geographic Intelligence.

2. This history traces the development of the three main procurement programs that have been used by the Map Library to fulfill its responsibilities for maintaining in CIA a specialized reference collection of maps of foreign areas and for coordinating the interagency map procurement requirements of US Government mapping and intelligence agencies.

25X1A

3. If you will return this copy to me when you have finished with it, I will arrange for it to be placed in the official Headquarters repository of completed histories being maintained by the CIA Historical Staff.

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[redacted]
Chairman, DDI Historical Board

Attachment

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